

# **OCS STATUS REPORT**

## **MARCH 1970**



**What's New in Infantry, Field Artillery and Engineer  
Officer Candidate Training**

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**By LT Robert W. Engelhardt**

**Associate Editor**

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**Through the Years:** Beginning with a 13-week training program in July 1941, Army officer candidate schooling has been tailored to meet the Army's needs for new officers. Schools at 27 locations commissioned more than 100,000 "Ninety-Day Wonders" in both 1942 and 1943 to supply the bulk of officers who led ground forces during World War II. But when need for officers declined, the number of graduates dwindled, reaching a low of 542 in 1950.

When war broke out in Korea, the Army established a 23-week course, which commissioned a peak of 12,514 second lieutenants in 1952. Afterward, two schools, at Fort Benning and Fort Sill, remained open and commissioned between 600 and 800 officers a year from 1956 to 1963.

OCS again expanded to meet increased manpower requirements for Vietnam. Starting in November 1965, six new schools were established—at Fort Belvoir, Fort Lee and Fort Eustis in Virginia, Fort Gordon, Ga., Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., and Fort Knox, Ky. The number of graduates grew from 3,672 in Fiscal Year 1966 to 19,240 in FY 1967 and 18,355 in FY 1968.

Having met requirements, the Department of the Army phased out five schools in FY 1967, leaving three today—Infantry OCS at Fort Benning, Field Artillery OCS at Fort Sill and Engineer OCS at Fort Belvoir. Fort Benning also commissions some candidates in the branches of Armor and Military Intelligence; Fort Sill is turning out Signal Corps and Air Defense Artillery officers in addition to those in Field Artillery. Officers assigned to the Corps of Engineers and all other support branches are commissioned at Fort Belvoir. The Women's Army Corps conducts two OCS classes a year at Fort McClellan, Ala.

Recently, a colonel in the Pentagon was asked how the Army's officer candidate schools were faring. "You can definitely say that OCS is changing with the times," the colonel replied. After a brief pause, he added, "That means it's getting easier."

What he meant was that the Army has eliminated from the officer candidate program many of the time consuming, trivial requirements that fall under the category of "attention-to-detail." Most officer candidates regret these changes, for they consider the program a great experience, if not the greatest experience, in their lives, and wish that others may share their adventures. The recent graduate recalls not the thousand hours of classroom instruction he received, but rather the time he came wheeling out of his barracks and stumbled over his tactical officer's brand new Corcoran boot that gleamed with a patent leather shine. Recalling the resulting 30 minutes of "grass drill," the graduate tells his ROTC-commissioned drinking buddies, "You don't know what you missed."

The present-day candidate will also miss many such traditions. The old "square-meal" is gone, for one thing. The graduate recalls when he had 10 minutes to finish a meal, at attention, sitting four inches from the edge of his chair, eyes straight forward, staring down the napkin holder in the center of the table. With knife and fork, he meticulously sliced a bite of food no larger than a postage stamp, lifted the morsel vertically from the table, made an imaginary square corner, brought the bite horizontally to his waiting lips, then placed knife and fork on his plate, returned hands to his lap, and chewed. For another bite, he went through the same procedure.

Today, candidates must still display good manners at the dinner table, but the only strict rule is "eat all you take:"

**Officer candidate schools are changing with the times; but Tacs and "Jarks," Ranger problems, Chinese fire drills and pogie bait runs are still a part of the program.**

"It's getting easier, I guess," said one junior candidate at Fort Benning. "My brother told me that when he went through the program they had to low-crawl to the mess hall every day. They couldn't walk across the barracks floor with their boots on—they had to take them off or clamber across the beds. Senior candidates were allowed to 'drop' underclassmen, which they did quite frequently."

A recent graduate of Fort Sill OCS, Second Lieutenant Norman C. Hile, nodded. "They're easing up now. Tactical officers are the only ones who are allowed to 'drop' candidates now. Upperclassmen can't or won't wreck the barracks very often, because they're responsible for the condition of the houses. And they're getting more passes. A while back, we took most of the candidates to the Oklahoma State Fair for a weekend. A few years ago, that would have been unthinkable."

"I saw something the other day I couldn't believe," remarked a senior candidate at Fort Belvoir. "A new class who didn't even have their heads shaved. I can't get over it. No more Beanheads."

"The Mickey Mouse is just about all gone," says Captain Robert J. Post, Jr., assistant operations officer of the Fort Belvoir Officer Candidate Regiment. "Three and a half years ago, they would make a man nothing; they would take away his dignity, harass the hell out of him, make him a machine; and from there they would build, giving a man privileges along with his growth. Now we have a new concept—Dignity of Man. They're doing away with mass harassment and doing what is good for the individual."

This doesn't mean that OCS is a picnic. It is still designed to place a man under physical, mental and emotional stress, simulating as closely as possible the

stress and fatigue of combat. Candidates don't find it any easier to get through the course. Many find the academics too rough, or they can't meet physical demands or display necessary leadership abilities. Others, particularly prior-service candidates, find they cannot adjust to the regimentation of OCS life. Attrition rates, in fact, have risen from 27 percent in FY 1968 to a present level of 33 percent.

The main difference in life at the three officer candidate schools is in the training. Candidates at Fort Sill concentrate on artillery subjects while their contemporaries at Fort Benning learn infantry tactics and candidates at Fort Belvoir study engineer problems.

Except on cherished passes, the officer candidate leads a strictly regimented life. For nearly six months, he will never wear civilian clothes. At all times, he must keep his cubicle and gear inspection-straight. His day begins early and ends late.

**0530: Reveille sounds at Fort Belvoir. Candidates rush about the barracks, make beds, lace shoes, shave four deep in a mirror, frantically attempt to make formation.** "If you can't get ready in time, you're in trouble," says a senior at Fort Belvoir. "It's all part of the program. Some shave the night before and again at noon. Some sleep on top of their covers. They all make sure they're out of the barracks."

The expression, "*Organize your time*," becomes as familiar to candidates as "Drop, candidate." In later service, a man will frequently find himself with a limited amount of time to accomplish many tasks. In combat, demands are intensified. So now, as candidates, they are required to accomplish an inordinate number of tasks in an unconscionably short period of time.

A favorite exercise used by Tacs to stress organizing time is the Chinese fire drill. Candidates in formation are given two minutes to rush inside and reappear in a new outfit, whether in Class A's, fatigues, khakis, or PT suits. "You're like a quick-change artist in a play," notes one candidate. "You've got to take shortcuts like wearing your PT suit under everything else. If you don't learn anything else at OCS, you learn to organize your time."

**0545: Fort Belvoir. Commands of "Fall In" and "All present and accounted for" echo through the battalion street. Formations are turned back to the companies for administrative announcements. "Some officers noticed that you men looked a little sloppy yesterday," the acting company commander says. "You're going to have to shape up."**

Candidates fill leadership positions while Tac officers stand nearby, watching. Each candidate will hold leadership positions for a week (as platoon leader, First Sergeant or squad leader) and be rated on his performance. Leadership accounts

for 45 percent of his final grade, the same as academics. Physical combat proficiency tests (PCPT) account for the remaining 10 percent.

In recent years, OCS has concentrated on enrolling college graduates with prior service, a majority of men who, faced with a likelihood of being drafted after graduation, decided to take advantage of the college option program. This guarantees an opportunity to attend OCS after completing basic and (advanced) individual training. The number of college graduates has grown tremendously in the past few years. In FY 1969, 60 percent of OCS graduates held college degrees, compared with 20 percent two years earlier. Today, commandants report that more than 90 percent are college grads. Looking to the future, Lieutenant Colonel Raymond A. Proietti, of the Army's Officer Procurement Branch, remarks: "We'll always have an officer candidate program to provide career opportunities for enlisted men and to give qualified civilians a chance to enter the Army and become officers. The size of the program will depend on the Army's need for officers."

**0645: Fort Belvoir barracks. Returning from the mess hall, candidates begin morning details. Footlockers come off the floor, a buffer hums, windows are washed, desks shined, a detail is dispatched to clean the Tac officer's "Tac Shack" and regimental buildings. Outside the barracks, candidates sweep sidewalks, cut grass, trim shrubbery. "We get them to concentrate on small things," says one Tac. "It has its effects, as any graduate will tell you. We emphasize the extreme in the hope at least some of it will rub off."**

**1000: A classroom at Fort Sill. Candidates single file into a classroom where a sign on a lectern reads, STUDENT RATING FORMS.** The instructor talks with a hint of a Southern accent. "I suppose you're wondering why there's a Student Rating Form class so early in the program. You'll be involved in several rating periods, and from today on you'll have to start taking a hard look at the man beside you. It's up to you to see if he has what it takes."

The class leader distributes the student rating forms. They list 14 character traits.

"Responsibility is the key word," the lieutenant continues. "You can delegate authority, But you can never delegate responsibility."

**1200: Fort Benning. Candidates line up for chow on a sidewalk near a portal reading "62d Company, Sir."** Inside the mess hall, candidates file through a service line. Lieutenant Howard E. Bushnell, a Tac, sits in front of a lunch of fried fish, mixed vegetables, baked potato, rolls and butter. In the background, a candidate bellows, "You have zero three minutes to clear the mess hall." Muffled groans greet the-announcement. "It's too bad we can't do this more often," the lieutenant says. "It gets them depressed and frustrated. That puts a little more pressure on them . . . gives us another chance to see how they react."

**1300: Apache Ridge, Fort Sill.** In a wooden classroom called a "shack," candidates observe a 155-mm howitzer round impact on Signal Mountain, 4,000 meters away.

Using gunnery charts and artillery slide rules, candidates compute the position of the round, then relay the information to a student in the rear of the class, operating a Field Artillery Digital Automatic Computer (FADAC).

Colonel T. E. Watson, Jr., sits in his office below a sign reading, "**Candidate: You Cost \$15,902. Don't Waste It.**"

"We have the highest rate of academic attrition here," the colonel says. "The man who is average today would have been an honor graduate two years ago. Academics are tougher now. The overall rate of academic attrition is up 200 percent from a few years ago. Motivational attrition rate is down 50 percent. "A man must pass all courses, including gunnery which is the toughest part. If a man drops below 70 percent, he is usually given one 10-week turnback. If he fails again, he is usually relieved from the program."

**1400: Infantry Hall, Fort Benning. A company of fourth week candidates enters a large auditorium, clapping hands and chanting "Fifty-first, Fifty-first," as they seat themselves in groups at work tables.** Lights dim. A film shows a platoon attacking a hill under artillery and mortar fire. One man on the screen becomes slightly wounded, runs to the rear in panic. The squad leader chases him. The rest of the platoon, seeing this, also begins running to the rear. The film switches to a close-up of a young lieutenant, the platoon leader, whose jaw drops slightly. Lights brighten as the film ends. The instructor, a captain wearing a Silver Star among his decorations, addresses the class. "O.K., take a few minutes and tell me what you would do if you were the platoon leader."

**1500: Fort Sill Physical Proficiency Course. A Jark is not a Lark.** Candidates cast long shadows as they run toward a captain wearing a Ranger patch on his shoulder. He clocks the men as they cross the finish line of a mile run. Very few stagger across. Candidates mill around the infield of a gravel quarter-mile track, puffing after the run.

"Did you see the rock we brought back?" one of them asks.

At Fort Sill, candidates cite the rock that class 4-70 brought back from "The Hill" on their first *Jark* as one of the most graphic examples of working together. "Cooperate and Graduate" is still an axiom at OCS. A *Jark* (named after retired Lieutenant General Carl H. Jark, first commandant of Fort Sill's OCS) is a 4.2-mile run, a combination of quick time and double step in full gear, to the top of Hill MB-4 and back again in 50 minutes. A candidate who receives too many demerits (25 for junior candidates; 15 for intermediates; 5 for upperclassmen)

during the preceding week may find himself on Saturday or Sunday runs. One recent graduate logged 201.6 miles *Jarking up* and down "The Hill."

On their first Jark, candidates traditionally bring back the largest rock they can lug, which their "Big Brother," an upperclassman assigned to guide them in their early weeks, must sleep with that night. Recently, one class decided to make a team effort and bring back a giant rock to represent the entire class. It weighed 40 pounds. The following classes decided to break the record, and the rocks coming back from The Hill kept getting larger—70 pounds, 90 pounds, 156 pounds. Then one class, "The Animals," using a bedpost, brought back theirs—260 pounds. "It was sheer guts," they say.

**1700: Fort Belvoir. Candidates returning from class have an hour of "free time" before the evening meal.** Some wander over to the "Tac Shack," a World War II wooden structure, for counseling by their Tac officer. Usually it is informal. The Tac goes over a candidate's records, peer ratings and test scores. He indicates areas where the man can improve. Others may march over to the PX to pick up supplies for their platoon. For still others, there are more details to be finished before chow.

**The Tac: "a necessity":**

The tactical officer stands between a row of wooden barracks, hands on hips, eyeballing a platoon in its third week of training.

One member of the platoon glances at the lieutenant through the corner of his eye. "Drop, Smack," says Lieutenant Nicholas H. Kondon, Tac, Foxtrot Company, Fort Belvoir Officer Candidate Regiment. The candidate dives toward the ground and assumes what is known as the front-leaning rest position—one with which he has become familiar, if not comfortable in, since his arrival. The rest of the platoon executes a left face and marches off toward the mess hall.

"Up, Smack," Lieutenant Kondon orders as he approaches the candidate. The candidate bristles to locked-heels attention, bracing himself so stiffly he forms a double chin.

"Don't you know enough to keep your eyeballs to the front when you're at *the position of attention*, candidate?" barks the lieutenant, now a nose away.

"Sir, Candidate Smack. . ." the candidate mumbles, "Yes, Sir."

"You've got to *sound off*. Smack," says the lieutenant, hurling more questions at the candidate, all demanding spontaneous and seemingly contradictory replies. The inquisition over, the candidate quavers, "Sir, Candidate Smack requests permission to Drive On." "Drive On, candidate," the lieutenant says.

Taking a half step backward, the candidate clicks heels, snaps a sharp salute, bellows "Good Morning Sir," the greeting of the day, and drives on, double-timing

his way toward the mess hall and increasing the distance between himself and his Tac as quickly as possible.

For Lieutenant Kondon, this is all part of the day's work. The Army is paying this man good money to make the life of an officer candidate less than idyllic. The candidate takes the confrontation seriously, for whether he will receive the gold bars of a second lieutenant or be shipped to a casual company will depend in part on the Tac's evaluation of his performance.

In the eyes of most soldiers, the role of strict disciplinarian is most closely associated with the OCS tactical officer. Reminiscing graduates reinforce the opinion, and the myth grows - The Tac is the man who makes Vince Lombardi look like Will Rogers, Jr. He would be delighted to request assignment as operations officer at the Black Hole of Calcutta.

Being a disciplinarian, however, is but a small part of the Tac's job. According to DA Pamphlet 601-1, "The tactical officer's principal duty is to assist candidates in successfully completing the course. This is done by advising candidates of their deficiencies and of ways to overcome them."

**Sets Example.** Essentially, the Tac is an educator, a counselor, and a model for the candidates. Usually a veteran of Vietnam or a recent graduate of OCS, he may have volunteered or have been assigned to the duty. Chances are he is married. In any case, he was selected because he has demonstrated outstanding leadership abilities.

Most agree that it is a rewarding assignment—but, they are quick to add, it is demanding as well. "See that," said Lieutenant Gary L. Hinaman, a Tac officer at Fort Benning, pointing to an Army cot in the corner of his office. "That's where I'll be sleeping tonight. I've been so busy I haven't slept in my apartment in two weeks; and tomorrow morning I'll be up at four o'clock. During a candidate's first weeks in the program, we're up before him in the morning and with him all day. I thought it was rough going when I was a candidate myself. This is worse.

"But it is rewarding. It's up to us to see if a man has what it takes. I can't think of any job for a second lieutenant with more responsibility. I figure a Tac can influence eight or nine hundred men a year."

As a candidate progresses through the course, his opinion of Tac officers changes from absolute fear to deep respect. Rarely will a candidate in his first four weeks of OCS stop in to see his Tac officer for counseling. "About the fifth week they'll start to trickle in," reports Lieutenant Roger E. Payne, Fort Belvoir. "They'll ask about areas where they can improve. By the time a candidate reaches senior status, the Tac will only be around as an advisor."



**Opinions Change.** Senior candidates express almost a surprising sympathy toward their tactical officers.

"They're a necessity," said an honor student at Fort Benning, "but they've got a tough assignment. They have to put in a lot of hard work in a regimented environment."

"I'll always consider our Tac as one of the finest officers I've known," said another brand new lieutenant at Fort Belvoir.

"Any time you wanted to speak to any of the Tacs, you could. They'll talk to you about anything. Of course, you can't cry on their shoulders. I really think they're a fine group of dedicated young men."

Besides supervising candidate activities, the Tac spends three or four hours a day counseling men in his platoon. For each counseling session, he pores over records, including peer ratings, academic scores, on-the-spot correction slips and notes on his own observations. In addition, he is required to present classes of formal instruction for which he must spend hours of preparation. And he is always assigned extra details. He may be duty officer one day and a defense counsel in a court-martial the next.

Still, the Tac officer is remembered by most soldiers as the hard-nosed taskmaster who provides "constructive criticism" in his ineffable way, who is ready to "drop" a candidate at the slightest whim. His philosophy of discipline is summed up by one of them—"You can be as hard on a man as you want, just as long as there's a point to it, a lesson to be learned. Otherwise, it's just harassment."

"Actually," notes another Tac at Fort Benning, "chewing out a man is tougher on us Tacs than it is on the candidates. After all, we have to think of something to say."

**1830: In the OCS parking lot at Fort Sill.** A candidate stands at parade rest, 18 inches from a car in which his wife and child are sitting. "I've got a sweat position next week," he tells his wife. "What does that mean?" "That means I've got a leadership position. I'll have to work hard." "Will you be home next weekend?" "I don't know."

At Fort Sill, candidates are allowed to see their wives for five minutes a day between 6 and 7 p.m. At Fort Benning and Fort Belvoir, candidates can see their wives for an hour, twice a week. Most married candidates decide to have their wives live nearby while they attend OCS. The chances to see their wives are limited, especially in the early weeks of the program. Some wives share apartments. Some take part-time jobs. Most join officer candidate wives clubs,

where they can get together and hold teas, hear briefings on the OCS program and rehearse skits which they put on to entertain their husbands.

Candidate Donald A. Gearhart, 24-year-old graduate of Midwestern University in Wichita Falls, Tex., is one man who brought his family with him when he entered Fort Belvoir OCS. His wife and two children live just outside Washington, D. C.

"I guess if it wasn't for my wife, I would have quit." says Gearhart. "She's been doing things for the whole platoon. She does as much as 10 or 12 people's laundry, even made our company guidon. And she's always available for pogie bait runs. All you have to do is get word to her through a note in a laundry bag or a telephone call and tell her how many hamburgers and cokes you want and what time to bring them and she'll be there. The attitude of the wives is tremendous. Any time you need materials—say the Tac wants you to decorate the Command Information board—they'll get them."

**1900-2100: Mandatory study period.** Candidates at all three schools sit quietly at desks, flipping through field manuals, rewriting notes, preparing for tests or the next day's classes.

**2100: A free hour.** More details. Those in leadership positions hold a briefing to outline the next day's schedule. At Fort Belvoir a candidate slips out on a pogie bait run to see if his wife has arrived with his platoon's order for roast beef sandwiches and donuts.

An unauthorized pogie bait run, or grotto run as Fort Sill candidates know it, is a good test of the candidates' initiative. At Fort Sill, candidates will get "three and three"—three weeks restriction and three weeks of Jarks —if caught. Tac officers are awarded a three-day pass for successful sleuthing.

**2200: Taps.** After a long day, lights go out, and many candidates can look forward to sleep.

But for a six-man patrol from the 64th Company, Fort Benning, the night is far from over. On a moonless night, they lie in red clay by the side of a dirt road, waiting to ambush aggressors from the 3d Ranger Company. The candidates are on the "Ranger Problem," to demonstrate how well they have absorbed classroom infantry tactics.

Supervised by Ranger officers who consider forced marches a fun thing, the training is realistic. And it can be dangerous, especially when deer season is open.

The 64th Company ambush was aborted. Using a jeep as a decoy, Rangers flushed the candidates out of hiding while a main force of aggressors crept

through the brush and attacked from the rear. A lane instructor critiqued their actions, and the candidates began marching back to their patrol base, using a compass and a field map as a guide.

Pushing through brambles and thickets, up and down pine-clad hills, through a knee-deep swamp, they reached the patrol base at 5:30 a.m. An hour later, the patrol moved out with the rest of the company.

**2400: Fort Sill. Candidates scheduled for a gunnery test the following morning are still awake, "magicking" for the test.** OCS may be easing up on some restrictions, but candidates still face a long day in a tough course. It is a small consolation that tactical officers say they went through a tougher program.

"The Tacs told us the same thing when I went through OCS at Benning," recalls Lieutenant Richard R. Schell, now assigned to the Pentagon. "They called us Champagne Company! We had it pretty rough. But it was a great experience. Let me tell you what happened on our Escape and Evasion course . . ."